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Chair

The Honourable John McKay

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● (1100)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone. It's 11 o'clock, and we are continuing the reference of Wednesday, March 28, Bill C-71.

We have with us two sets of witnesses. We have Fédération des femmes du Québec, coming to us by video conference, we hope, and we have PolySeSouvient, who are going to split their time among themselves as they see fit.

I will remind members of the audience that there are no pictures allowed during the hearings.

With that, I will ask those who are not here via video conference to speak first. Let's hope that those coming to us by video conference will join us shortly.

Ms. Rathjen, I'll turn the microphone over to you. I assume you will split your time as you see fit.

Ms. Heidi Rathjen (Coordinator, PolySeSouvient): Thank you very much. Good morning.

[*Translation*]

Hello, Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen of the committee.

The organization "PolySeSouvient" is an informal group of students and graduates of the École Polytechnique, as well as survivors and families of the victims of the 1989 massacre at the Polytechnique. We also work with the families of victims of other gun killings.

I would like to mention the presence of Nathalie Provost, a survivor of the Polytechnique killings, and Serge St-Arneault, the brother of Annie, who was killed there. We are also joined by representatives of student associations, including Wendy Vasquez, President of the Quebec Confederation for Engineering Student Outreach, Jade Karim, Mobilization Coordinator of the Quebec Student Union, Manuel Klaassen, President of the Association des étudiants de Polytechnique, or Polytechnique student association, as well as a number of other students and graduates who are with them.

Our mission is simple: to reduce the number of deaths, injuries, and crimes committed with firearms. Having witnessed the human suffering that a single gun in the wrong hands can cause, we consider it our duty to make our voices heard in the public debate on gun control in order to defend everyone's right to life and safety.

[*English*]

Despite our strong criticism regarding its scope and its strength, we support Bill C-71. The measures contained in the bill will allow Canada to move forward by reversing some of the losses that occurred under the previous government, namely the requirement to verify the validity of a potential buyer's licence, and a reinstatement of sales records at commercial points of sale—in both cases, for non-restricted firearms.

Unfortunately, Bill C-71 is not a bold step. It barely fulfills the Liberal election promises, and it fails to address many flaws in the current law. For example, the Liberals promised to "repeal changes made by Bill C-42 that allow restricted...weapons to be freely transported without a permit". However, before Bill C-42, authorizations to transport allowed the transportation of restricted weapons for very specific itineraries and even a period of time, for example, between a gun owner's home and the gun club of which he or she was a member. Bill C-71 does not reinstate this previous situation. In fact, the bill still allows the owner of a handgun to transport it between his home and any of the approved shooting clubs or ranges within the province, even if the person is not a member and the gun has no business being there.

The bill also does the minimum in terms of control on sales. If the goal is to support effective police work and deter illegal sales, Bill C-71 should have extended this requirement to private sales, as was recommended by the B.C. Task Force on Illegal Firearms. Since private sales are not included, opportunities for undetected diversions to the illegal market are still possible. For example, it will not be possible to track the future sale of any of the seven or eight million non-restricted firearms that are currently privately owned in Canada. At least in Quebec, more than a third of all transfers of non-restricted weapons in a year are between private individuals—one third.

Finally, the bill in no way addresses the legal availability of assault weapons, despite repeated warnings by the RCMP about their risk to public safety.

The intent of the 1991 and 1995 laws was to prohibit civilian versions of military weapons and large-capacity magazines, but because of the arbitrary nature of some of the criteria in the laws, the failure to update regulations meant to ban variants of prohibited weapons, loopholes, and unforseen market adaptations with respect to large-capacity magazines, it is today legal in Canada to own assault weapons for recreational purposes and to easily equip them with magazines that surpass the legal limit.

We hope that this committee will see fit to strengthen the legislation, and we hope that the Liberal government will also commit to further improvements beyond this bill.

Thank you.

● (1105)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rathjen.

Mr. LeRoux and Mr. Benabdallah, you have about five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel LeRoux (As an Individual): My name is Michel LeRoux and I am Thierry's father, who was killed by a bullet on February 13, 2016, barely six months after joining the ranks of the Lac-Simon police. Thierry was confronted with an intoxicated, armed man who had a history of suicide attempts and whose guns had first been taken away from him, but to whom Thierry himself had returned those guns as ordered by his superior.

How can it be that an individual with that history was able to keep his gun licence, had his guns returned after they had been seized by police and, worse still, was able to obtain more guns, including an assault weapon?

It is unacceptable that such things happen in a country like ours, where owning a gun is not a right but a privilege, and where public safety is supposed to be the first priority. That tragic day changed our lives forever. Suffering, pain and tears are now part of our daily lives. My spouse Christine cannot get over it. My other son, Steffan, lost his brother and best friend. My grandson Charles-Antoine lost his beloved uncle. For all of us, life will never be the same. The people close to our family and I are counting on governments to study the circumstances that led to an avoidable death such as this and to make the necessary changes to prevent this from happening to others. Preventing any further victims is one of the few consolations that help ease the suffering of families such as mine. The people here in the room show that my family and I are not the only ones who have been through this.

Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, in its current form, the bill changes nothing whatsoever in the situation that led to Thierry's death. I understand that the law has to allow a measure of discretion. On the other hand, when the risk factors are so serious and obvious —such as a history of violence combined with suicidal tendencies, as in the case of my son's killer—, those persons should automatically be prohibited from owning a gun. That is already the case in certain states in the U.S.

Thierry's case is not an isolated one. Similar incidents have occurred because the law is too lenient. There are many ways of strengthening it, such as establishing criteria for an automatic ban or a list of criteria that can lead to a ban. As to my son's case, I would like a documented history of violence and suicide to be considered dangerous conduct that leads to automatic seizure of guns. Police officers like Thierry risk their lives every day. Of all the police officers killed in the line of duty, about nine out of ten are killed by a bullet. Like all citizens, they deserve protection against armed violence. I urge you to amend the bill so that my son Thierry did not die in vain.

● (1110)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. LeRoux.

Mr. Benabdallah, you have less than two minutes, unfortunately.

Mr. Boufeldja Benabdallah (President, Centre culturel islamique de Québec): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for inviting us here today. I am the President of the Centre culturel islamique, or Islamic cultural centre, which was founded in 1985. I have been in Canada for 50 years. I grew up in this peaceful, harmonious country, but in recent years, we have seen a change that is very dangerous to society, and I have witnessed it.

I have come here with brothers, one of whom was struck by bullets that went through his abdomen and hit his kidneys, and another one whose knee and toe were shattered by a bullet. Worse still, six people were killed and five injured, and we now have 17 orphans. We have a lot to say.

If there is one thing I want to ask of you today—just one thing—, it is that civilians should be prohibited from owning assault weapons. They are weapons of war intended to kill people and not for training or recreational shooting in the woods. In fact, we should also show our trees more respect and not shoot at them. We let people who are not in their right mind have weapons that are designed to kill, weapons of war, that should only be used by members of the military in accordance with the rules.

If that man had entered a shopping centre, as he had said, and had taken out his gun, there would have been a lot more victims. If his gun had not jammed when he wanted to kill the first two Guineans and he had killed them, he would have killed the 80 people there and would have gone up to the next floor to kill others. Please help us and help society by prohibiting these assault weapons and weapons of war in Canada. It is in the interests of all of society.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Benabdallah.

The next witness is from the Fédération des femmes du Québec, or Quebec women's federation.

[*English*]

Via video conference, we have Alexandra Laberge.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laberge, you have the floor for 10 minutes.

Mrs. Alexandra Laberge (Co-leader, Comité de travail Féminisme, corps, sexualité, image, genre et violences, Fédération des femmes du Québec): Allow me to introduce myself briefly. I am Alexandra Laberge and I am an elementary and high school teacher. I am a volunteer member and activist with the Fédération des femmes du Québec, the Quebec women's federation or FFQ, and co-chair of the working committee on feminism, the body, sexuality, image, gender, and violence.

I would like to use the privilege of officially representing the FFQ here today, and the voices of the women and girls of Quebec—and the voices of the women and girls of Canada as well, I hope—to remind the government that firearms issues are women's issues.

Women's struggle against firearms is historical, global, and legitimate since firearms are primarily owned by men who victimize and make women vulnerable by how they use them. Our struggle dates back long before 2012, when the previous government passed Bill C-19.

In the years since then, we have suffered another affront as a result of Bill C-42, in 2015. Women mobilized and the public statements, briefs and actions, as well as the heartfelt cries of women who have suffered as a result of these bills have finally been heard by a Liberal government that has promised reform to the women of this country. We are confident that this government has heard us since we represent half of Canada's population and are the targets of the bullets fired predominantly by men.

Unfortunately, we do not think Bill C-71 will adequately protect Canadian women and girls. In our opinion, the government could do better than this bill to improve the safety of women and girls in Canada. We would like to take this time today to remind you of what these women and girls have concluded and what has been shown by various authorities and women's groups. We would like to give you recommendations that are the result of these women's reflections, which we consider legitimate and feasible, in order to help preserve the safety of women and girls in Canada.

As a volunteer, and at the same time as my work as a teacher, I have studied more than a dozen briefs, reports, and written demands by women, yet I have looked only at what has been produced since 2012, and in French only. Supported by reliable sources and recognized bodies such as Statistics Canada and the RCMP, these women have done an outstanding job in order to be recognized once again in the government's decisions on firearms. I hope that these documents, which have been reported in the media and are readily accessible, have been read and studied, but I have not been able to look at everything that has been done elsewhere in Canada. We could rely on the data from Statistics Canada, which are quite telling, or other government platforms, but women always have to work extra hard to assert their rights and, nowadays, their safety. That is why the Quebec women's federation insists on honouring this work by raising the main points that these women have taken the time to identify and that we officially support.

All the written briefs point out that firearms are a women's issue. Let us not forget that firearms are primarily owned by men and that, although they make up the majority of victims of homicide statistically speaking, women should not suffer as a result of firearms or laws that make it easier for men to harm them.

The Coalition for Gun Control, reports, for instance, that although men are more frequently the victims of homicide, women are about three times more likely to be killed by their spouse.

Let us recall the discussion in 2015 surrounding Bill C-32. More than 30 women's groups in Canada spoke out about the impact of Bill C-42 on the safety of women. Eighty-eight per cent of Canadian women were killed by a bullet that was fired by legally owned shotguns or rifles, the same weapons that some people do not consider to be the cause of gun violence.

Guns are fifth among the 18 main causes of death in domestic homicides.

● (1115)

Investigations of family violence, such as in the case of the children of Kasonde and Arlene May and the Vernon massacre, have shown the weaknesses of the old act. Changes to the current act have been recommended. Risk detection needs to be improved for gun licence applicants by using detailed questionnaires and requiring two references from the applicant, along with notification of the spouse. A gun registry should also be created because important information is missing from police databases.

Fifty per cent of domestic homicides end with the killer committing suicide, which shows that the key to protecting women and children is to thoroughly review gun licences and gun licence renewals. Eighty per cent of gun deaths in Canada are suicides which, for the most part, are committed by a rifle or hunting rifle that can be easily obtained.

In rural communities in western Canada, in particular, people are less in favour of gun control and the percentage of people with firearms licences is higher.

Women and children are especially vulnerable when there is a gun in the home. In Ontario, 55% of killers in cases of domestic violence had access to a firearm. The recent Small Arms Survey of 2013 studied the relationship between guns and domestic violence. It states among other things that while men account for the majority of victims and of those committing homicide using guns, the number of women killed, injured, and intimidated by guns in situations of spousal violence is significantly higher. Appendix D of the RCMP report states that some of those deaths could be prevented through stricter laws that prohibit persons found guilty of spousal violence from carrying a gun. Further, the report entitled "Homicide in Canada, 2011" shows that stricter firearms laws have protected women and children.

We agreed to appear today because we think the current government, through its actions and decisions, which support feminist policies, will finally consider the safety of women a top priority. We have chosen to take on this responsibility because what we are proposing will be analyzed by competent people and adopted for the safety of women in Canada.

We have two recommendations, which we are making jointly with "PolySeSouvient".

The first is to prohibit anyone subject to a protection order from carrying a gun.

The second is to clearly prohibit anyone found guilty of spousal violence, rape or other sex crime from carrying a gun.

These recommendations would not eliminate gun violence against women, but our objective is more realistic. We are calling on the government to impose stricter regulations in order to reduce the number of women killed.

Carrying a gun is not a right; it is a privilege. It is logical and legitimate that people who are found guilty of a crime, especially crimes against women, should lose that privilege.

We want the government to take a clear stance on these two issues and show its support for the safety of women in Canada by adopting these two realistic and necessary recommendations.

In closing, we would like to mention the forgotten women and girls who suffer because of the right to carry a weapon, people who are not mentioned often enough and are never given the opportunity to be heard. According to Statistics Canada, indigenous women and girls have been forgotten for too long and suffer the consequences of guns more than non-indigenous members of both sexes combined.

The report entitled "Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile" shows that older women are also the victims of gun violence and are more likely than older men to be killed by a family member.

Finally, we must not forget transgender women, for whom no statistics are available as of yet.

In conclusion, I will draw a brief parallel with what is happening to women in the United States. Since the start of the year, there have been 22 school killings in the U.S. In Canada, we have also had our share of tragedies at educational institutions in which women were targeted in particular. Teachers, who are still part of a traditionally and primarily female profession, are offering an interesting perspective on women and men beyond the intimate sphere, the family, the public sphere or the workplace. Women are not safe because of the laws that allow people to own guns.

● (1120)

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam Laberge, can you wrap up, please?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Alexandra Laberge: Fine.

We want the government to protect women and girls at home, in the street and in their workplaces.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Thank you to all the witnesses. We now have a round of questions.

Madam Dabrusin, you have seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): I'd like to begin by thanking all of the witnesses. We heard some very personal stories today, and I thank you for having taken the time to come and tell them. About PolySeSouvient, I was a student at Dawson College in 1989, and I also remember the tragedy at École Polytechnique very well. It is something I will always remember, and that I carry in my heart at all times. I know that you work very hard to keep that memory alive.

Mr. Benabdallah, from the Islamic Cultural Centre of Quebec City, I want to thank you, and I want to say *Ramadan Mubarak*. I appreciate the fact that you took the time to come and meet with us.

You all explained your positions very well, as well as what you would like to see in this bill. Personally, I receive many emails and letters from people who complain and ask questions about certain parts of the bill. Perhaps you can help me. I am going to explain these complaints that I receive, and perhaps you can tell me what you think of them.

One promise I heard a lot about was that the RCMP again be made responsible for the classification of weapons.

I am going to continue in English because it's a little easier for me.

● (1125)

[*English*]

Removing the Governor in Council override of firearms classifications is something that has been raised as a concern. I was wondering what your thoughts are about putting that back in the hands of the RCMP.

[*Translation*]

We will begin with Ms. Rathjen, from the PolySeSouvient organization.

[*English*]

Ms. Heidi Rathjen: We support removing the authority brought in by Bill C-42, which allows the minister to override. The RCMP doesn't decide which guns should be classified as restricted, non-restricted, or prohibited. The RCMP interprets the law. According to the criteria in the law or the regulations, the RCMP will deem a weapon restricted, non-restricted, or prohibited.

This power that allowed politicians to override, to second-guess, the interpretation by the RCMP, is for us an aberration. It's anti-democratic, it's deciding arbitrarily that certain guns are not subject to the law, and so we welcome the removal of this power. At the same time, it doesn't address the fundamental problem, which is that according to the criteria in the law, under the system we currently have, assault weapons remain legal.

There are many restricted assault weapons, and there are many assault weapons that are unrestricted. Canadians do not need this weapon for legitimate hunting or sporting purposes. This is a .50-calibre semi-automatic weapon. It is banned in certain U.S. states, like California. It's non-restricted here in Canada. There are a whole bunch of them.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: I have some more questions for you, so I will ask if we—

Ms. Heidi Rathjen: We have a number of them pictured in our brief.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: The other part that I've had some questions about and that people have asked me about is the authorization to transport, the ATT, and the new system being put in place. I understand you have some suggestions as to what you would like to see happen when we're looking at this legislation with respect to the ATTs. Maybe you could tell us a little more about what you would like us to be focusing on when we're looking at this legislation.

Ms. Heidi Rathjen: We would like the bill to reflect the promise of the Liberal Party, which was to repeal the changes made in Bill C-42, which made authorization to transport restricted weapons pretty much automatic, not only automatic but allowed between a gun owner's home and any of the hundreds—depending on the province—of gun clubs, gun ranges, police stations, border stations, and so on.

This bill has taken out a few of those categories of places but, as we heard from the officials, wouldn't change anything for 96% of itineraries, meaning that a gun owner today with Bill C-71 could still be a member of a gun club in Toronto and end up in Ottawa with a handgun and be legal.

The way it was before Bill C-42, the way the Liberal election promise said it wanted to repeal it to come back to.... I have here a copy of the former articles, and just to quote:

> A chief firearm's officer may issue to an individual an authorization to transport if the chief firearms officer determines that the transportation of a restricted weapon or prohibited firearm...between two or more specified places will not pose a threat to [public] safety....

The permit specifies the period for which the authorization is valid, the two places between which it can be transported, and the reasons why.

What Bill C-71 proposes is far from that. It will not change much in terms of the transportation of restricted weapons.

● (1130)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: To clarify, though, because of where we are starting, it does make some changes as far as the ATT. You welcomed those changes, and you're asking for further changes. Am I correct?

Ms. Heidi Rathjen: We don't feel there's much change when you can still be anywhere in your province, as long as you're between your home and a gun club. That defies the purpose of having authorizations to transport. These are restricted weapons. They should be restricted to the purpose for which they are allowed, and that means travel to a gun club. Then you get another permit if you need to take it to the gun shop, for example.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dabrusin.

Mr. Motz, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

At the outset I'd like to give notice of the following motion that we would like to have read into the record:

> That, given the concerning reports of terrorists who fought for the so-called Islamic State walking free in Toronto, the High Risk Returnee Interdepartmental Taskforce be invited to brief the Committee on their work no later than Thursday, May 31, 2018.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Glen Motz: My first question is to you, Ms. Laberge. Your group has previously stated that you believe a firearms registry is necessary to ensure the safety of women from domestic violence. While I disagree on your policy outcome, I would be interested in knowing whether you view the record-keeping requirements in this bill as a gun registry and if you believe they will actually help improve the safety of Canadians?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Alexandra Laberge: Excuse me, but I did not understand the question.

[*English*]

Mr. Glen Motz: I'm sorry. I'll try that again. I'd be interested to know whether you view the record-keeping requirements of this bill as a gun registry and if you believe that they will actually help improve the safety of Canadians?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Alexandra Laberge: We think that what is included in Bill C-71 regarding the register is a good start, but we feel there should be more restrictions, as we said in the recommendations we made regarding family violence.

There's no doubt that bringing back registries is one of the best solutions to enable the identification of women who are vulnerable because their husband has illegal firearms. As for police intervention, we think that this could help women who are trapped in a cycle of violence. Police officers could know if the spouse owns a weapon.

[*English*]

Mr. Glen Motz: As I'm sure you are aware, the Common Sense Firearms Licensing Act passed by the previous Conservative government expanded the use of firearms prohibition orders to those convicted of domestic violence offences.

What I've taken away from your presentation today is that we really must address the risk factors that are present to stop the escalating domestic violence situations we have in this country. Do you think this bill does that effectively, and would you support mandatory firearms prohibition orders for those convicted of serious personal injury offences?

● (1135)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Alexandra Laberge: Yes, absolutely.

In fact, the recommendation would provide a framework for restrictions on the possession of firearms for anyone who has been convicted of assaults on women, family violence or sexual assault.

We would like better protection against men threatening women with firearms, when those men have already committed violent acts, either physical or sexual. In both cases, these are acts of violence. The firearm facilitates that type of violence and makes it more serious and more threatening.

[*English*]

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you.

Mr. LeRoux, thank you for being here today, and our sincerest condolences on the loss of your son.

On April 12, you wrote that you did not believe anything in this new bill would have prevented the death of your son. You briefly made mention of that in your opening testimony. Can you expand on that just briefly for us?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel LeRoux: Indeed, the part related to Thierry's death that concerns background, that is to say the part that extends to the individual's entire life and any background of violence, family violence and other elements like mental illness, is a step forward.

However, we are not taking into account what happens between the new request, the moment when the permit is issued, and its renewal five years later.

If, for some reason or another, an individual manages to get through the net and obtains a permit, there is nothing to stop you from implementing the systematic withdrawal of permits following an episode of family violence. Withdrawing firearms and weapons in those cases is optional. It's not mandatory, but that option can be considered if the firearms owner has a record of family violence.

As it is currently worded, the bill would not have prevented Thierry's death, nor that of several other police officers, despite the amendment. I am aware that it is a small step forward, but it is not enough. It would not have prevented Thierry's death. Mr. Papatie would have had access to his weapons.

[*English*]

Mr. Glen Motz: Just so you are aware, Conservatives certainly share your view that keeping firearms out of the hands of those who are dangerous is critical. Unfortunately, we feel this bill does nothing to deal with that, but merely puts more red tape on law-abiding gun owners.

Would you support measures to target dangerous individuals, like a mandatory firearms ban for those convicted of serious personal injury, and would you support seizing firearms from those who have serious mental health issues and are detained for their own protection under provincial mental health legislation?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel LeRoux: Yes, absolutely.

I would support such an amendment, and not only for those who have been convicted. There are people who have not been convicted, but have had repeated episodes of family violence, or attempted suicide. All of these elements have to be included, not only for those who were convicted, but also for those who are known to police and medical authorities. We should include all factors related to mental illness, whether schizophrenia or Alzheimer's, and not only family violence.

The Chair: Mr. LeRoux, your time is up.

Mr. Michel LeRoux: Any mental issue requiring medication should justify the confiscation of firearms and permits from a person, even if they have not been convicted.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Motz.

Mr. Dubé, you have seven minutes.

● (1140)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank all of you for being here today. It is already difficult to fight for a cause, and having to relive horrible tragedies like yours requires even more courage. And so I thank you sincerely for being here with us.

Last week, following Minister Goodale's testimony on this bill, I questioned him about an issue which is important to you today, that is to say the definitions that lead to firearms classification by the RCMP. I think that in the debate surrounding this issue, we have skipped one step. Like you, I am in favour of giving that power back to the RCMP, and of withdrawing the right of veto, to call it that, from the cabinet—simply because such decisions should not be taken by politicians of any party.

That being said, I'd like to hear your opinion on the issue of definitions. I would like to know if generally, you are in favour of revising those definitions. This would help guarantee public safety, which is your goal.

I would also like to know how long it has been since these firearms definitions that are to be included in the law were updated.

Mr. Boufeldja Benabdallah: In reply to that question, if it were put to the Muslims of the city of Quebec, who recently had to deal with this situation, I would say that the classification is important to technicians in that field. You are asking us about that, and some people might reply in a more detailed manner, but for my part, I would like to ask you another question.

Do the politicians around this table take to heart the governance of the country? Do they care about getting a peaceful country that is recognized as such globally back on its rails? Do they care about protecting people?

If that is the case, what is preventing you from focusing solely on what we are asking for, as people who had to go through these events, and on behalf of all Canadian citizens? We have met with people, and everyone we met was astounded to learn that that individual owned an assault weapon.

Could you, as politicians, act in a concerted manner, unanimously, and set aside your political differences to see to it that these assault weapons are banned? We would at least have gained one thing. The entire Canadian nation would applaud you. Beyond definitions and classifications, we are talking about weapons of war that kill. What other classification could we adopt?

Please, be unanimous, be good. Please take to heart the desire that the country stand tall and not feel obliged to imitate its neighbour, and believe that the country wants to regain a certain pride; when they travel, Canadian citizens want to hear that they belong to the most peaceful country in the world.

Personnaly, I travel to various parts of the world. While I was with the Institut de l'énergie et de l'environnement de la Francophonie, I travelled to all of the francophone countries. When I go back there, what I am going to say to those people? That we are killing people in Canada with assault weapons, war weapons that are readily available on our markets?

Is this not a shameful thing for our Canadian nation?

I think that you, politicians and political officials, are responsible for banishing these weapons, so that we can really say that Canada is standing tall, despite political allegiances with neighbouring countries, or with other countries that have not banished these weapons.

Forgive me for speaking at some length, but beyond these definitions, I wanted to send out this call to all of you who are here today.

I thank you for having given me this opportunity to speak. I am going to keep trying until I succeed, inch Allah, God willing.

Ms. Heidi Rathjen: As for definitions, the Canadian law, unlike other laws such as the American ones, does not define assault weapons. It does not refer to military firearms, paramilitary firearms and assault weapons. It only contains criteria for restricted, non-restricted and prohibited weapons. What we note is that the classifications are not related to the risks presented by the weapons. You saw the assault weapons we showed you. They are not restricted, and that makes no sense.

You are asking us what the technical solution is, but we are not experts. As Mr. Benabdallah said, it's up to the government to see to it that the most destructive weapons, those that have been designed to kill human beings, are not made available for personal possession.

I also want to answer your last question on updating the definitions. Around 2012, in several of its notes to the office of the minister responsible, the RCMP complained that the regulation that could have prohibited certain variations on assault weapons that are already prohibited had not been updated. Since 2012, two or three weapons may have been added, but in general the regulation has been ignored for more than 20 years.

● (1145)

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. LeRoux, I only have a minute left but I'd like to give you an opportunity to talk about what you raised with the minister in a letter to which you will, I hope, receive a reply.

I'd like to hear you talk about the background checks and the fact that we are not always in a position to identify all of the problem cases. I know that you have some ideas about that and I'd like to give you an opportunity to express them.

Mr. Michel LeRoux: For the most part, the message I sent to Mr. Goodale was about backgrounds containing violence, and everything that concerns the different types of mental illness. I'm referring to individuals that are known to health professionals and to the police. Police officers repeatedly withdraw their weapons from these individuals. They are returned to them later for all kinds of reasons, or because the law says it is optional and not an obligation. That is what must be avoided.

Finally, in my opinion, that makes no sense. When an individual has a violent or suicidal background and must take medication and is under its influence, he should have his gun permit withdrawn. It should be the responsibility of the person who has such a history to demonstrate that he can own firearms.

If an individual drives when impaired, he loses his driver's licence. We don't do that for weapons.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. LeRoux.

Thank you, Mr. Dubé.

[*English*]

Ms. Damoff, you have seven minutes, please.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Through you, first I'd like to thank all the witnesses for being here today. To those of you who are with us who've lost loved ones, I want to extend my deepest sympathy. Thank you for your courage to come to speak to us today.

I know that all of you have followed this firearms legislation and firearms policy for a number of years.

I have a number of things I want to deal with, so I'm going to ask you to be very brief. How you would compare this legislation? While I know you feel it doesn't go as far as you would like, could you compare this legislation with that of 10 years of the previous government as well as the platform that was put forward on firearms by Mr. Scheer during the election campaign?

Ms. Heidi Rathjen: It's certainly an improvement over the previous system that was in place, which was weakened under the past government. Unfortunately, I think the comparisons that we find most important are those comparing what was previously in place in Canada or what is currently in place in the United States. Commercial sales records are the law in the U.S., so now at least we're in line with American law in terms of controls on sales.

However, we're a little worried about the access to this data. The minister has talked about judicial authority. We're not sure that this judicial authority was required in the past, and we want to make sure that police and government officials have easy access and quick access to this data.

In terms of supporting police work, it is much weaker than what was in place in terms of sales when the registry was in place. Under that system, all the data was centralized. If the Mayor of Toronto asked.... The minister talked about considering the possibility of being able to flag arsenals, people who buy many, many guns. It's just not possible when the records are kept in the stores. You can't see a pattern when the data is hidden in all the stores. In any case, where would you start looking? Why would you start looking?

The bill falls short of what it could have been and what it was in the past.

● (1150)

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

One of the things, as I've been speaking to stakeholders and police and other organizations, that I have heard about and which I believe you put forward as well, is the idea of the duty of health care professionals to warn. When they suspect that violence using a firearm is likely, should they have a duty to warn the chief firearms officer?

I'm wondering what your thoughts are on that proposal.

Ms. Heidi Rathjen: I'll be brief because we consider that to be more under provincial jurisdiction. The duty to warn has to overcome privacy issues, and so on.

Quebec passed "Anastasia's law", Bill 9, after the Dawson shooting. With that law, medical professionals who notice a risk to public safety for a patient who owns a gun have to notify the Sûreté du Québec. This was recommended for other provinces to implement, but I don't think it falls under the purview of federal law. But we do support that, obviously.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay.

This one would fall under federal law in terms of the background checks. Right now we've extended the time period for the background checks. We have not added any criteria to it. Something that has come up in a number of my conversations has been the incidence of online hate and misogyny—where people are posting on social media—and the ability for that to be included when the chief firearms officer is checking whether a firearm should be.... I've heard this from police and I've heard it from people who work in the field of gender-based violence.

Do you think that would be worthwhile to add to the criteria?

Maybe I could hear from our friends by video conference on this as well?

Ms. Heidi Rathjen: Certainly one of the things we're asking for, any time there is a—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Alexandra Laberge: Yes.

[*English*]

The Chair: Sorry.

We will have Ms. Rathjen first, and then Ms. Laberge.

Ms. Heidi Rathjen: Okay.

In terms of criteria for automatic prohibition, one of the amendments we're asking for is that, when there is a protection order, that it includes a restraining order. I'm not very familiar with the laws. I don't know if stalking online could be part of that.

We are asking that a certain criteria, like a hard criteria that leads to automatic prohibition, be strengthened.

We also think that the criteria to be considered, where there should be discretion, should be broadened in any case. So certainly online stalking should be taken into consideration.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I only have a minute left. Could you be fairly brief?

I have one other question to get in before my minute is up.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Alexandra Laberge: I don't think monitoring Facebook and social networks is the solution. Rather, I think that whistleblowing by the victims is the solution, and that you have to focus more on individuals who were charged.

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Damoff: No, I'm not talking about it being a solution. I'm asking if it should be a criteria that's included when you're looking to see whether someone should be able to purchase a firearm. Shouldn't be one of the criteria?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Alexandra Laberge: I don't think I can answer on behalf of the FFQ today.

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay.

Because I was asking a number of questions at the last meeting about gender-based violence, I've had a number of people contact me who say that it's not an issue. In fact, there is a website, Gun Debate.ca, where it says it's not an issue and that there are stats that show women are not targeted with firearms. However, when I go to the office of the chief coroner for domestic violence in Ontario, I see that 26% of women' deaths are caused by a firearm.

Yes, or no, would you say that women are at risk of violence because of firearms?

The Chair: Very briefly, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Alexandra Laberge: Their safety is not jeopardized by firearms, but by the people who use those firearms.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

Ms. McLeod, welcome to the committee. You have five minutes, please.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Just before I get into my questioning of the witnesses, I believe you have on record a notice of motion, and I believe it should be a quick vote.

I'd like to move:

> That, Greta Boenmaier, newly appointed National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister, be invited to appear before the Committee at her earliest convenience.

● (1155)

The Chair: It was moved in the last meeting.

I'm moving to resume debate.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Is that not what we voted on first?

The Chair: Excuse us. We now have some clarification.

This is a fresh motion. Is there debate?

Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I move to adjourn the debate.

The Chair: There is no debate on this.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you.

That brings us down to about three minutes.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you to all the witnesses, and I apologize for that. Sometimes we need a quick minute to deal with some of the committee business that needs to be dealt with.

I grew up in an urban area and had no exposure to hunters, fishers, or guns until I moved to a rural community as a young married woman where I became much more familiar. One of the first things I witnessed was one of the farmers shooting a cougar that was stalking young children. Certainly there's no question it saved the lives of those young children. My understanding of the possession and acquisition licences and the process became much more nuanced than when I had my urban upbringing.

We all want the same thing. We all want gang violence to diminish. We want people off the streets who shouldn't have guns. I always have concerns that sometimes we just increase the red tape on the people like this gentleman I talked about who had a gun as a tool. When we do that, we create additional red tape and work for him. We don't do anything to solve the issue that we truly all want to solve.

Perhaps I'll start with Mr. Benabdallah. I can just imagine the tragedy and the trauma that your community has gone through and how raw the feelings are. Are you convinced that this bill is going to do what it's intended to do, which is to take guns out of the hands of dangerous offenders and individuals?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Boufeldja Benabdallah: If you accept our recommendation for this bill that more weapons of war, assault weapons, be prohibited, classified and eliminated, we will all be winners. That is why we came here.

When he came in to kill those people, what did he start with? He started with a war weapon, which fortunately got jammed up. Otherwise he would have caused a carnage. We never want to see that happening again.

So let's start with that approach. Please prohibit those weapons, and we will all come out ahead. We will have reduced the threat against human lives for years to come.

● (1200)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. McLeod.

Thank you, Mr. Benabdallah.

On behalf of the committee, I want to thank each of you for your efforts to appear before the committee and express your views. With that, we will suspend for two minutes and then re-empanel.

● _____ (Pause) _____ ●

The Chair: Colleagues, we are now back on. Our witnesses for the next hour are Alison Irons and Jérôme Gaudreault. I'll leave it to the two of you to sort out who wishes to speak first. Each of you will have 10 minutes.

I just want to apologize to the committee for the confusion over the motion. We were a little caught off-guard on this one.

Yes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Chair, could I just do this briefly? I want to do this so I don't interrupt. I move:

> That, given the importance of the rights impacted by C-71, including as noted by the Justice Minister, its potential impact on the right to be secure against unreasonable search and seizure, the Committee hold additional meetings to allow the following witnesses to testify:
>
> Women Shooters of PEI
>
> Dr. Caillan Langmann, Emergency Medicine Resident, Fellowship Program of the Royal College of Physicians Canada, Division of Emergency Medicine, McMaster University
>
> Stacey Hassard, Leader of Official Opposition, Yukon
>
> Andy McGrogan, President, Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police
>
> Richard Munderich (Ajax Rod and Gun Club of Ontario)
>
> Gord Zealand—Yukon Fish and Gaming Association
>
> Harvey Andrusak—BC Wildlife Federation
>
> Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation—Derrell Crabbe
>
> Bob Kierstead—Shooting Expert, International Firearms Instructor
>
> Kerry Coleman—Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters
>
> David Clement, Consumer Choice Centre
>
> Manitoba Wildlife Federation
>
> Fédération des Chasseurs et Pêcheurs du Québec
>
> Nova Scotia Federation of Anglers and Hunters
>
> Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM)

● (1205)

The Chair: Mr. Calkins, you know that the subcommittee has already met and the witness list has already been agreed upon by the subcommittee, and therefore, the committee.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I'm aware of that.

The Chair: You're aware of that. Okay.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: The subcommittee does what the committee asks it to. I'm asking the committee to include the following witnesses, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

Is there debate?

Ms. Pam Damoff: Is this something we're voting on right now?

The Chair: We could debate it and vote, or we could postpone debate.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I would just say, Chair, that the subcommittee did a lot of work coming up with a balanced list of witnesses, so I wouldn't support adding additional witnesses at this time.

The Chair: Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: If I may, Mr. Chair, there are a lot of organizations in this country that represent people who are going to be impacted significantly by this legislation. The number of witnesses I've provided here, at the current rate of five per committee meeting, would only take another week, at the most, maybe a week and a half if we were able to get five per committee meeting. That's 10 people per week. There are about 15 names here. That's an additional three meetings of this committee. That's not an unreasonable request, given the scope and the number of people who are affected.

I would urge my colleagues here to hear from these groups. They want to testify. They want to be here. They should not be stifled in any way from being able to testify before the committee.

The Chair: My concern is that we do have witnesses and we do have limited time.

Mr. Dubé.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: That's perfect, Mr. Chair, because out of respect for those who are here, and in speaking of allowing people to speak, without having a position one way or another on the witnesses proposed, I move to adjourn the debate.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: With that, have we sorted out who's speaking first?

Ms. Irons, welcome to the committee.

Ms. Alison Irons (As an Individual): Good afternoon Mr. Chair, and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me to speak today.

My name is Alison Irons. I'm the mother of Lindsay Margaret Wilson who, at the age of 26, was stalked and murdered by shotgun by her ex-boyfriend on April 5, 2013, in Bracebridge, Ontario, two weeks before completing her graduating semester at Nipissing University.

My daughter's killer drove from Kingston earlier that week and followed her car from her tiny campus to discover where she was living. The day of her murder, he drove up again, followed her, and hid behind the house. He took four videos of himself on his phone preparing to kill her, and waited until she emerged from the house. He confronted her in the driveway and shot her while she bargained for her life, with pellets and slugs from one of the two long guns he took with him to ensure that he got the job done. He then took his own life.

She was conscious for a few moments, but in no pain, and told EMS that she knew she was dying. Imagine living with that as a parent. Mortally wounded, she didn't know that her murderer had killed himself beside her. She died about 20 minutes later at the Bracebridge hospital.

According to the pathologist, there was extensive internal injury to my daughter's heart and lungs. Her killer knew what he was doing. I'll tell you, as an ex-RCMP officer myself, that this is a lethal target known as centre body mass. Her right shoulder was fractured, five ribs were shattered to pieces. Her left forearm was completely fractured and left hanging by a thread, with what the pathologist called an avulsion of most of her left forearm, likely a defensive wound.

She had minor gunshot wounds to the back of her head, likely from the first shot spinning her body around, and stippling wounds to the lower part of her beautiful face. I'm grateful to the pathologist's staff for concealing these facial injuries with makeup, so that I could kiss my daughter goodbye for the last time.

I don't apologize for being graphic about my daughter's injuries. This is what guns do in the hands of the wrong people.

My daughter met her killer sometime in 2009 or 2010. He hid his criminal past from her and had plausible explanations for why he, as an adult, was living with his parents and seemed to have no real job prospects or tangible income. He was charming, articulate, clean-cut looking, and a recreational hunter.

There was no violence in their relationship, although he could be controlling and manipulative. She left him for the first time in 2011 when she caught him drug dealing. He successfully lured her back with false promises of change, but a year later she caught him drug dealing again.

In 2012, she was devastated when he contracted meningitis and nearly died. She thought that his illness was her fault for having left him. When he survived, she, as a person trained in disability support and out of her sense of guilt, tried to help his recovery, but by Christmas the same manipulative, controlling behaviours recurred, and she severed all contact. He stalked her and murdered her three months later.

As a career-long investigator, I researched his history. He had concealed from my daughter that in 2000 he was arrested by one police force for drug trafficking. Seven days later, he and another male kidnapped a third male from a residence over what Kingston Police believe to have been a drug deal gone wrong. They bundled the victim into a car, drove him off down a secondary highway, while one of the two beat him up in the car. He escaped by rolling out of the moving car onto the side of the highway, where he was rescued by a passerby, and taken to police. Had he not done so, who knows if the victim would have been murdered.

My daughter's killer and the other kidnapper were charged with approximately five offences including forcible confinement, assault, threatening, and at least a couple of other charges, which Kingston Police told me were related to drugs. Through an apparent plea bargain, he was convicted in 2002 of only forcible confinement and assault, through summary conviction. The previous drug trafficking charge was withdrawn. His only sentence was two years' probation.

● (1210)

Immediately upon completing his probation in 2004, he applied for and was granted a possession and acquisition licence. He privately purchased several guns, one of which was the gun he used later to murder my daughter in 2013. Through my own sources, I learned he had been extensively interviewed about his PAL application under the self-reporting model. This meant that he had been red-flagged in the Canadian firearms information system, what is known as a stage A failure, but this flag was then discretionarily overridden in order to grant him the gun licence.

Before he met my daughter, and again concealed from her, he was warned by a person in authority, apparently due to a domestic violence incident, that if he didn't obtain a pardon for these prior convictions, his PAL would not be renewed. Although this incident is recorded in the Canadian firearms information system, it wasn't coded by police in such a way as to precipitate a firearms hit or trigger a review or revocation of his licensing. Yet this warning suggests to me that his licence should never have been granted in the first place. CFIS also contained a conviction for impaired driving.

As Lindsay's mother I ask you how someone with adult criminal convictions for forcible confinement and assault related to drug trafficking, as well as an impaired driving conviction and a CFIS entry for a domestic violence incident could ever get a gun licence in Canada. How does our gun licensing system fail to properly take into account and weigh the actual context of someone's convictions and other CPIC or CFIS history before granting them a licence? Did he obtain the PAL and the guns for hunting, as he likely purported on his application, or did he obtain them to protect his apparently ongoing drug-dealing career over 13 years?

Our gun licensing system and process, particularly in the area of background checks, definition and validation of references, treatment of criminal offences, and the apparent broad discretion to override stage A failures or red flags, clearly failed my daughter. Please don't tell me that he just fell through the cracks.

Justin Bourque killed three Mounties in New Brunswick using legally acquired guns. Alexandre Bissonnette killed six people at a Quebec City mosque using legally acquired guns. Mayor Tory of Toronto has recently written to the minister for help since, due to tighter border controls limiting the smuggling of illegal guns into Canada, trafficking in legally acquired domestic guns to criminals and gangs is on the rise.

Since we couldn't even protect my daughter, we cannot say that bills such as the former C-51 and C-59 protect Canadians from terrorist acts, mass shootings, or lone wolf gunmen like the one who killed Corporal Nathan Cirillo on Parliament Hill, if we do not correspondingly review and begin to strengthen our gun legislation, regulations, policies, processes, and systems and close the gaps.

In the case of an applicant with convictions for personal violence, especially when related to other serious crimes such as drug trafficking, background checks must be more comprehensive and must consider the applicant's adult lifetime criminal history and the context of any crimes of personal violence. Definition of appropriate references for PAL applications must be more stringent and should not include immediate family members or those with a criminal record. All references for those with a criminal record for personal violence should be validated as to suitability, CPIC and CFIS checked, and contacted. An appropriate level of skilled resources should be in place to ensure that more comprehensive background and reference checks can be conducted.

Do I have just one minute more?

● (1215)

The Chair: It's half a minute.

Ms. Alison Irons: I'll be quick.

A review of the criteria and treatment of stage A failures in CFIS by chief firearms officers and the completeness and currency of data in CPIC and CFIS must be improved to avoid the granting of gun licences to applicants based on incomplete information.

In summary, some people have said to me that my daughter's killer could have obtained an illegal gun anywhere. My response is always, "Yes, but he didn't." He legally acquired the licence and the gun he used to kill her nine years later. Our gun licensing system should not have made it easy for him.

Thank you for listening.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Irons.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gaudreault, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Jérôme Gaudreault (Chief Executive Officer, Association québécoise de prévention du suicide): Thank you.

Good afternoon, members of the committee. I thank you very much for your invitation to come to speak to you about firearms control in the context of suicide prevention.

I am the director of the Association québécoise de prévention du suicide. The AQPS is a community organization that aims to promote and develop suicide prevention on the territory of Quebec. More specifically, we work to raise awareness among the population, and we make representations to elected officials so that measures are put forward and implemented to support suicide prevention. We also want to mobilize citizens and encourage them to take a position and rally in favour of this cause. In addition, we offer various training products developed for citizens, as well as for those who work in suicide prevention, and health professionals.

I will say from the outset that we have on several occasions expressed our position, which is in favour of better gun control. We in fact spoke out against the abolition of the federal long-gun registry in 2011. There are many studies that show that a series of measures to control firearms have a positive effect on reducing the suicide rate. I'll get back to that. In our opinion, Bill C-71 represents a step in the right direction, but we think that some of its provisions should be strengthened.

I'll say a few words about the state of suicide in Canada and Quebec. On this day alone, 11 people will commit suicide au Canada. In Quebec, there are 1,100 deaths by suicide annually. Among these, more than 125 are committed with firearms. There are 4,000 suicides in Canada each year and 1,000 of these take place in Quebec; that's a lot. Although there was a significant drop in the number of suicides in Quebec at the beginning of the decade, our society has not made any significant progress on this issue for close to 10 years.

As for those who are vulnerable to suicide, you must know that the suicidal person has not formally decided to commit suicide. Not only is his vision of things clouded by the suffering that he wants to put an end to, but he is ambivalent about his death up to the very last minute. That is why the method chosen by the suicidal person is so important, because the longer he or she delays, the more time there is for him to change his mind and obtain help. For each person who dies by suicide, we estimate that between 25 and 30 people make a suicide attempt that is not completed. If people do not complete the act, it is not because they are unable to commit suicide, but because they change their mind along the way.

Unfortunately, firearms are extremely lethal—their success rate is 96%—and that means that only very rarely does the suicidal person get a second chance. The firearm amplifies the impulsivity of the gesture and gives very little time to the person's friends or family members, to first responders or police officers, to intervene effectively and save the person's life. Statistical analysis and research shows that 80% of deaths by firearm are suicides. The weapons used are mainly non-restricted weapons, rifles or long guns. In 50% of suicides, less than 10 minutes go by between the beginning of the crisis situation and the suicidal act. When a vulnerable individual is in crisis, if he has easy and immediate access to a lethal weapon, the risk of suicide is much higher.

The risk of suicide is five times higher in homes where there are weapons. Hunting rifles are the most common type of firearm that is found in homes, and a large proportion of suicides using firearms are committed with a weapon the person does not own. It is recognized that deaths related to firearms constitute a major public health issue, and statistics show that in countries that have stricter firearms control, the rate of suicide using firearms is lower than the rate in countries that do not have such controls.

However, suicides can be prevented, and in order to reduce their number, it is necessary to implement a series of measures which, when applied simultaneously, create a context that is favourable to the prevention of suicide. According to the World Health Organization, reducing access to the means to commit suicide, such as firearms, is considered one of the most effective ways.

In order to control firearms effectively, those who own firearms must have a permit issued following a safety investigation. That is currently the case in Canada. We must also educate owners with regard to the safe storage of their firearms and the risks related to them. We can also say that that is the case in Canada. However, when we realize that one third of suicides with weapons are not committed by the firearms owner, we see that there are still some important gaps with regard to safe storage. The firearms also have to be registered. Registration is important because it facilitates the work of police officers and responders when they know that a person is in crisis and is thinking of suicide, and they can protect him against himself.

Currently, in Canada, there is no way of knowing how many weapons a distressed person may have in his possession. In order to ensure the safety of the occupants of a home, police officers have to have that information. This allows them to identify the legal owners, facilitates the traceability of weapons, and makes the owners more accountable.

● (1220)

Here is some conclusive data on the effectiveness of firearms registries.

According to the Institut national de santé publique du Québec, between 1998 and 2011, the years when the Canadian long-gun registry was in effect, the number of suicides by firearm in Quebec went from 283 to 131, annually. That is a 53% drop. There was no substitution by other means noted either, since the number of suicides using all other means besides firearms also declined. That is 150 fewer suicides using firearms per year. There was a lot of talk about the cost of the registry, but the cost of suicide is also high for Canadian society. Studies assess the cost of a suicide to be between $600,000 and $1 million for the community.

We believe Bill C-71 should be amended in order to tighten eligibility criteria and strengthen background checks of individuals seeking to obtain, renew or maintain permits in their possession; include notification of upcoming purchases in the new monitoring procedures for non-restricted weapons; allow easy and quick access by police officers to data on arms sales without procedural obstacles, such as having to obtain a court order; reintroduce permits for the transport of restricted weapons so that they specify the exact locations where the presence of such weapons is permitted; prohibit assault weapons; revise provisions regarding large-capacity magazines so as to impose a real five- or ten-cartridge limit on non-restricted and restricted firearms; and eliminate loopholes and prohibit firearms that can easily be modified to get around the legal limit. In these ways, we fully support the recommendations of PolySeSouvient.

In conclusion, suicide is a preventable cause of death. It's not a random fact that the number of suicides in Quebec decreased by close to a third between 2000 and 2008. That important decline can be explained by the combined effect of a number of measures, including increased control of access to firearms. The decline in the number of suicides using firearms demonstrates that clearly.

Hundreds of Quebeckers and Canadians who seriously considered suicide are still alive today and happy to be alive, because in a moment of despair, they did not have access to this way of committing an irreparable act.

Thank you.

● (1225)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gaudreault.

[*English*]

Mr. Fragiskatos, you have seven minutes, please.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to both of you for being here.

Ms. Irons, I want to start with you.

Your perspective is a very important one. Thank you for your courage in sharing your story. It's particularly important to me because you've been directly impacted by gun violence. In your presentation, you talked about guns that are legally acquired and their role in violent acts. Opponents of the bill talk—almost instinctively, it would seem; it's almost a knee-jerk reaction—about how the bill does not look at gang violence, gangs, criminality, and along those lines. Gangs are obviously involved in the distribution of guns; that does happen. This government has introduced measures to deal with that, independently of Bill C-71.

Could you speak to that point that opponents raise? When they say, "Well, there's nothing to do with gangs here. Therefore, what does this actually do?"

Ms. Alison Irons: The point that I made in my remarks that I'm learning more and more.... I have a friend who's a former homicide investigator in Vancouver who tells me that in the greater Vancouver area recently there's been almost a shooting a day that is related to gang violence. The point I made was that, from everything I've researched and understood, the police in the city of Toronto are seeing that, as its becoming more difficult at the border to get illegal guns into the country, trafficking in legally acquired domestic guns from allegedly law-abiding Canadian citizens to criminals and gangs is now on the increase. I'm not an expert on that, but that's my understanding from my research.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Indeed, that lines up with some of the other things that we've heard in testimony here at the committee. Thirty per cent of violent acts involving a gun do involve long guns, most of which are acquired legally.

I want to raise another perspective that opponents of the bill frequently bring up. We heard comments here today, in fact, from my friends opposite. It is this whole idea that Bill C-71 is introducing red tape to law-abiding gun owners. As you know, under Bill C-71, vendors would have to keep sale information. This would involve the date of purchase, the firearm's licence number, and the make and model of the firearm that is sold. Most already do this on a voluntary basis because it's a best practice, but under Bill C-71 this would become mandatory.

In your view, as someone who has been directly impacted by violence, is this about red tape? What do you say to that sort of argument? I find it absurd, but I want to hear your perspective.

Ms. Alison Irons: I need to think about my answer for a moment.

I think part of that argument is that the gun lobby in Canada, as it were—or whatever you would like to call it—is arguing that this is about taking away guns from law-abiding citizens and it's also about bringing back the former long-gun registry. I've not heard anywhere that's in fact the intent.

For example, in my daughter's case, without any tracking of that firearm.... In fact, remember that he took two firearms with him. He lived in a house that he shared with his parents. When he acquired those guns, he and the seller failed to record any transfer in the gun system, which they were supposed to do. That gun, had he not been captured at the time or had he not killed himself, could not have been attributed to anybody in that household. Had he lived, that means it would have been almost impossible to determine who should have been charged as the owner of that firearm.

Again, I had to think through my answer, and it's perhaps not the best I could give. I've always thought that if there were no way of tracking that firearm whatsoever, we couldn't link it in some cases—especially in a larger household or some sort of communal living—to who was responsible, as the owner of that gun.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Your answers are very clear, and the committee is better for hearing your testimony. The specific measure we're speaking of here is about making sure we can give police the tools they need to track all of this. I think it's a very reasonable way to go about things, and I wanted to get a victim's perspective as well.

Mr. Gaudreault, you've spoken about the importance of background checks, but I wonder if you could speak to the importance of mental health information as part of a background check in all of that.

● (1230)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jérôme Gaudreault: Yes, absolutely.

It's very important to know the mental health history of a person who applies for a gun permit. That is indeed a risk factor. It is thought that in close to 90% of suicides, mental health issues were a factor, ranging from more minor issues such as depression, anxiety, or stress to more serious troubles such as schizophrenia and borderline personality disorder. So this is a major risk factor, though it is important to point out that the fact of having mental health issues does not mean that one will necessarily resort to suicide. In the majority of cases, people will not go as far as suicide, but the fact remains that it is a risk factor.

When an investigation is done to determine whether a person can be given access to firearms, those risks have to be taken into account, and an applicant's mental health history is one element that needs to be considered.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Mr. Gaudreault.

In a similar sort of vein that I put the question to Ms. Irons with regard to this argument about red tape, what do you make of positions like this?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jérôme Gaudreault: There is no doubt that from the point of view of gun owners, who comply with the law in the majority of cases, this can be considered red tape and an annoying formality. However, in my opinion, given that gun ownership is not a right but a privilege, and one which presents a risk to the safety of the population, we have to put all the means at our disposal to guarantee public safety.

Putting a registry in place and carrying out a security check on the person's background are measures that allow us to ensure, or at least improve, the safety of the person and to verify whether that person will act responsibly around firearms.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Motz, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to both witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Gaudreault, a study in the *Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy* found that while there is an obvious connection between the firearms ownership rate and the firearms suicide rate, there is no connection between the firearms ownership rate and the overall suicide rate.

Now while it's logical to assume that the presence of a firearm could lead an individual who is contemplating suicide to act in a quicker fashion, it seems that the facts don't bear that out. Would you not agree that there are more complex societal factors than just the presence of a firearm that dictate rates of suicide?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jérôme Gaudreault: In fact, according to the studies we have, the presence of a firearm in a home increases the risk of suicide fivefold.

The data published by the Institut national de santé publique du Québec show that the number of suicides caused by firearms decreased by 53% between 2000 and 2008. The institute's assessment is that half of that drop was specifically related to the creation of the Canadian long-gun registry.

Why? Putting such measures in place can indeed be considered as annoying red tape, but it makes gun owners more accountable when it comes to the safe storage of their firearms. When police officers have to intervene in crisis situations, time is very limited and they need maximum information in order to modulate their interventions. Having access to that information increases safety, in my opinion.

[*English*]

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you.

You indicated earlier in your testimony that 90% of suicide incidents are related to mental illness. Do you believe that this bill goes far enough to ensure firearms are taken out of the hands of those who are mentally ill to stop them from harming themselves or others? Then, would you support a measure to seize firearms possessed by individuals who are detained for their own protection under provincial mental health legislation?

● (1235)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jérôme Gaudreault: I'll start with your second question. Indeed, we support and recommend that firearms be taken away when they are in the possession of people who present a risk. From what I know, the process in Quebec is relatively simple: a report can be made to law enforcement authorities, who can intervene with the gun owner who presents a risk. Generally that person will voluntarily agree to give up their weapons.

As for whether the bill goes far enough, I'd say it would probably be possible to do more in-depth background checks for those who apply for gun permits, to go further back into the person's history, and to allow for more extensive security checks. This can be done by phone with the actual applicant, but also with the people connected to the person.

[*English*]

Mr. Glen Motz: Having said that, how would you strike an appropriate balance between the vigilance to keep firearms out of the hands of those who apparently are mentally ill and ensuring that we don't drive individuals who may be seeking help for some mental health condition underground or have them keep quiet for fear that it may impede their ability to enjoy sport hunting as they might do currently? How do we do that responsibly?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jérôme Gaudreault: That is a good question.

I'll be honest with you, I don't necessarily have an opinion on that.

But in my view, a person with mental issues, even if he wants to engage in recreational activities like hunting or the like, should not have firearms in his possession.

However, it's very important that we do not stigmatize those who have a history of mental illness. A person can have an episode of mental illness or a suicidal crisis and get over it completely. It's a matter of making sure the person has recovered before he is given permission to exercise this right.

[*English*]

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you.

Ms. Irons, thank you for being here today. First of all, please accept our condolences on the loss of your daughter in this horrific act. It takes strength for you to be here. It takes strength to be part of the political process, and I applaud you for that. While we may not always agree, I always think it's important for victims of crime to have a voice and be heard in the political process.

I'd like to ask you about efforts to keep firearms out of the hands of dangerous individuals like the one who took your daughter's life.

While this bill allows initial background checks to expand their search to the life of the applicant for licence, it does nothing to really enhance the continuous eligibility screening or ban the possession of firearms from those convicted of serious personal injury offences, drug-related offences as in your case, or gang-related offences or those who have been detained under any provincial mental health legislation. Would you support measures, as I asked previously of other witnesses, to indicate those sorts of requirement in this legislation?

Ms. Alison Irons: Having worked in government most of my career, one of the things I do know is that a bill is a bill and what flows from the bill are the regulations, the policies and the processes to implement and support the bill. To me, the bill alone, when it refers, for example, to background checks, is only the first step. There is work to be done on how that bill is then to be implemented.

I do remember many occasions in my government career where the government would pass a bill and, we used to use the line, "chuck it over the fence" for the public servants to then figure out how to implement. I think it's too narrow to say, "Will the bill do this and will the the bill do that?"

However, my personal bias is that for somebody with a criminal record such as my daughter's killer concealed from her, where there was a crime of serious personal violence that got plea-bargained down to a much lesser offence, when combined with something, as you've mentioned, like drug trafficking, first of all, there should be no discretion under the stage A failure for the CFO to override that.

As far as I can tell...and, again, because of privacy law in Ontario and in many other provinces, I wasn't able to obtain the records on what else was done to check his background except to interview him. I wasn't able to find out whether his references were his mother or his best friend who had a history for domestic violence, but I do know from speaking to the police officer who arrested him in that kidnapping that they were never contacted by the CFO and they were shocked that nobody had contacted them to find out the context of those offences. I might add, they were more shocked to find out that he then used that firearm to kill my daughter.

Thank you.

● (1240)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Motz. Thank you, Ms. Irons.

Mr. Dubé, you have seven minutes, please.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Gaudreault, Ms. Irons, thank you for being here.

I want to echo comments made, obviously, and offer condolences, but also to thank you for your service, as well, in the RCMP. I think, in reading through your brief, that you talked about putting those investigative skills to use. We see that and there are a lot of really interesting points.

There's one that I want to look at where you, in the recommendations, talk about the fact that one of, if I'm not mistaken and I didn't misread, the persons supporting the application also had a criminal record. Is that correct?

Ms. Alison Irons: I should clarify, as I just said, that because of the privacy law in Ontario I wasn't able to find out exactly who his references were on the PAL application, but the application as it currently stands is not very stringent. Apart from excluding conjugal partners, anybody can be a reference on a gun licence application. That can be your mother or your best friend. In my view, those people are very often likely to lie for you or minimize your background if you have a criminal, mental health, or other history.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: You mentioned that the crimes were treated as summary convictions instead of indictable offences, but would the person on the other end, the chief firearms officer, have been able to see the nature of the crimes regardless, or would that also have been locked up?

Ms. Alison Irons: What I'm not clear about in that case was whether all that was done.... I know that because he was extensively interviewed, he would have encountered what is known as a stage A failure or a red flag in the system. That's what precipitated the interview. However, what I can't determine because of privacy barriers is whether the only other check that was done was a CPIC check and a CFIS check.

For example, I don't know if crown counsel reports were ever reviewed. I know that the Kingston police officer who arrested him for those offences, as I say, was never interviewed. I don't know the extent of the background check and I understand that very often references aren't contacted, and secondly—sorry, I lost my train of thought for a moment—there is a large use of, for example, volunteer personnel sometimes to conduct those reference checks. In this case, I don't know who conducted it. I did try to find out and was unable to do so.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: But it's clear that something set off, as you said, a red flag that led to the process going further than it would for a standard application.

Ms. Alison Irons: Yes, I'm sure the forcible confinement and assault convictions led to that stage A failure.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: There are definitely gaps that need to be filled, then. I'm wondering from your experience, both with this horrible situation and with being with the RCMP, another legislation that this committee studied.... You mentioned CPIC, and it comes up a little in your brief, just the fact of the information being out of date and the fact that even across provincial borders sometimes there can be challenges as well.

Would you agree that working on improving that type of infrastructure would go a long way, along with other changes that need be made to how these checks are conducted, to help along this process and try to close any of these gaps that exist?

Ms. Alison Irons: What I was able to establish, and also had confirmed by the chief superintendent of the criminal investigation branch of the OPP, is that in large court jurisdictions like the GTA, criminal record information, or charge or domestic violence information, is transmitted electronically to CPIC and CFIS. In smaller jurisdictions, it's very often sent by paper.

With my experience in government, that often leads to delays in data entry and loss of paper. In smaller or remote communities, some court jurisdictions never send data at all. That means with the gaps in the system right now—and by the system, I mean the Canadian firearms information system—licences are being granted on the basis of incomplete or out-of-date information.

I don't think it's any surprise to anybody on this committee that there have been chronic delays even in the ability of the RCMP to keep CPIC up to date. I think chronically and historically, it's run about six months behind. I don't know if that's the current situation.

● (1245)

Mr. Matthew Dubé: I apologize for interrupting, as I have a short time left.

[*Translation*]

I have another question for you, Mr. Gaudreault.

In our study of Bill C-71, I had the opportunity to question some people about what has come to be known as "Anastasia's law" in Quebec. There are people elsewhere in Canada who wonder whether we should not consider something similar. However, there seem to be loopholes in that approach, when it comes to reporting problematic cases.

Can you tell us a bit about that experience? This could be useful to us, if we pass Bill C-71, for instance, in order to give us a better understanding of the ethical dilemma for a psychologist or other health professional who would like to provide information to prevent a tragedy or violence from occurring.

Mr. Jérôme Gaudreault: I'm not fully aware of all the circumstances relating to "Anastasia's law". Our specialty is really suicide prevention. In my opinion, however, when you consider all safety aspects, confidentiality should not be the priority. One has to report risks, if one feels they are present.

Take, as an example, an article that was published recently in *La Presse+*, on the verification procedure for gun permits. In Quebec, the office of the Chief Firearms Officer calls on the references that were given. They are asked specific questions, such as whether the person has a marked interest in committing violent acts, in terrorism, or whether he is connected to specific groups in his region. Some very specific questions are asked that do provide an accurate picture of the situation.

In my view, even if there are confidentiality issues, I think it is incumbent upon us to look into the situation as thoroughly as possible.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: That's good, thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dubé.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Picard, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Michel Picard (Montarville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first question is for Mr. Gaudreault.

Before getting to Ms. Irons' even more serious case, let's start with more conventional cases regarding the means of suicide.

You said that the acquisition and possession of firearms is a privilege and not a right.

Suicide triggers vary greatly. We understand that mental illness can be one of them. That said, losing a job or undergoing a separation can be a very serious event, more or less serious according to a person's level of tolerance; such events can trigger depression and a series of events that can lead to suicide.

Should we systematically verify whether the person who is experiencing a crisis has firearms in their possession, and if so, automatically remove them from him? Should this be a quasi-automatic procedure?

Mr. Jérôme Gaudreault: It is in fact a normal procedure when it is known that the person has weapons and that he is at risk of being suicidal.

I'll give you the example of people who work in suicide prevention in Quebec. When they meet with a client, they ask if he or she has firearms at home and if he has access to means to commit suicide. That is one of the first questions they ask. Firearms are a very lethal means of committing suicide. So workers take the time to check on that specifically. If the person says yes, he is asked to relinquish his firearms voluntarily. He is asked whether he is in agreement that his weapons be removed. Generally, people agree. If they refuse, then a report is made to authorities.

Mr. Michel Picard: I see.

How do you keep a balance? We always want the best for persons who are in crisis. Rehabilitation is always desirable, or hoped for, I would say, as someone who has experienced something like that. Since owning firearms is a privilege, would you, even if the person has recovered, insist that they not have access to firearms again?

Mr. Jérôme Gaudreault: That is a good question, and frankly, I don't have a specific answer for it. That said, you need to make sure that enough time has passed before the person is allowed to recover their weapon. A medical evaluation should show that the person no longer has mental issues or suicidal ideas. In that case then, the possibility could be considered.

Mr. Michel Picard: In the personal examples of depression we heard about, the person was dealing with their own feelings. But what we are increasingly seeing these days — it's become almost systematic — are people who attack others and then commit suicide.

How do such cases, similar to what Ms. Irons experienced, develop?

● (1250)

Mr. Jérôme Gaudreault: What do you mean by "develop"?

Mr. Michel Picard: I get the sense that over the past 10 years or so, it has become increasingly frequent to see someone assault another person with a weapon and then take his own life. I'm thinking here of massacres that occurred in the United States, or situations like the one experienced by Ms. Irons and many others. I may not have grasped the scope of this problem at the time, but it seems to me it was far less frequent 15 years ago. Now, it's almost systematic; people hurt others before they take their own lives.

What is the operative process there which we should understand, and how does it evolve?

Mr. Jérôme Gaudreault: I don't have specific knowledge of all the processes related to homicides and suicides. The process is indeed different in the case of a suicidal person. The fact remains that the person is experiencing acute suffering. However, insofar as statistics are concerned, I think there is a certain stability. The difference is that there is now more media attention focused on the phenomenon.

Mr. Michel Picard: Okay.

You said that the registry had brought about more accountability.

Will the commercial practices we've included, such as ensuring that those who sell firearms keep records of their sales, also increase accountability? You referred to increased accountability earlier.

Mr. Jérôme Gaudreault: In my opinion, it contributes to creating a certain state of mind, a context. The person who wants to acquire firearms sees that some fairly serious security measures are in place. It isn't easy to obtain a gun permit. It's not necessarily easy to purchase a firearm. It's a way of making the owner aware of the danger and lethal nature of the product he is purchasing and of making him take the necessary measures to ensure greater safety.

Mr. Michel Picard: Ms. Irons, I first would like to say that I feel powerless in the face of your situation, the courage you've shown and the pain you are living with. I'm going to ask you to help me direct my approach.

The all-too-frequent problem we are facing in this case is that long guns are legal and available everywhere. We can pass all the laws we like, but I get the feeling we will never be able to prevent the use of long guns, which are commonly available. They are in fact the target of more and more break and enters and thefts, precisely for the purpose of committing armed assaults.

I'm faced with a dilemma. I don't know how to approach the matter of long guns, that are a common enough reality of life. Everyone owns them. In rural areas, they are common, for specific reasons. Some people own them for cultural or historic reasons, others for sport or hunting. Personally I don't hunt anymore, but that's immaterial.

How should we approach the issue of long guns? We are facing a dead end, to some degree. We do not have a short or medium-term solution.

[*English*]

Ms. Alison Irons: I would need to think more about that question, but I can say this in response. I often hear about the rights of hunters and ranchers in rural areas to defend their property and so on and so forth. In fact, when the long gun registry was rescinded, a submission to the committee at that time said that rural women experiencing domestic violence feel far more terror if there is a long gun in the home and that the long gun itself might be used as part of the terror. In other words, they're often threatened with the use of that long gun: "If you don't do what I say, I'll shoot you."

What frustrates me to no end is that we continue to hear about the rights of hunters and ranchers to defend their property, which, by the way, I don't object to. I'm not trying to get rid of all guns, but what about the rights of women and children to have equal standing under the law and be protected from the use of those long guns to kill them? I don't hear that in the debate.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Picard and Ms. Irons.

Mr. Calkins, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: That was very interesting testimony today. I want to thank both of you for being here.

There's a question I have for you, Mr. Gaudreault. I will start with you. One of the concerns I have and one of the things that I've heard in the years that I've been a member of Parliament is that there's sometimes a general mistrust between the public and the government. One of the areas of mistrust that I've come across the most is from the community that I represent, the law-abiding firearms community, in terms of their general mistrust of the government, whether it's the classification process or what have you.

I guess this is my question for you. If there were a protocol in place whereby the confiscation or seizure of firearms was automatic based on a mental health consideration—if somebody went to a doctor or went to get the help they were looking for in regard to some of the triggers that people in the suicide prevention industry and so on would be looking for—would that automatic confiscation protocol not deter people in some scenarios from getting the help they actually need? I'm wondering if, in the balance of more good than harm, that's actually the right way to approach it. Do you have any information to help me with that?

● (1255)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jérôme Gaudreault: As to whether we should indeed confiscate the weapons of people who are at risk, the answer is yes. We have to encourage any measure that allows us to remove weapons, voluntarily or following a report, from a vulnerable person who is at risk of committing suicide.

[*English*]

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Do you not agree with me that for those who have a general mistrust of the government coming into their lives in such a manner—because the seizure of people's property is something that is of concern to a lot of people—if that were an automatic protocol, do you think it might actually deter people from getting the help they need?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jérôme Gaudreault: I'm not sure I understood your question. However, I believe the majority of the population wants to see safety measures around guns, despite the fact that those who oppose any form of gun control express themselves loudly and clearly.

I think the majority of Canadians want safety measures to be put in place. In my opinion, Canadians are also in favour of arms being confiscated and of background checks for potential gun owners before they are granted permits, because those are measures that will improve safety.

[*English*]

Mr. Blaine Calkins: As somebody who's from the law-abiding firearms-owning community, I agree that every time somebody does something illegal with a firearm it casts aspersions, and it makes it more difficult for me as a law-abiding citizen. That's a frustration for me. I want to make sure we get this stuff right too. I have a vested personal interest, but I also, on behalf of the people I represent, want to make sure that we get the legislation right.

I'll move to you, Ms. Irons. Thank you for your testimony today.

You were nine years in the RCMP. Did I get that right? You mentioned that you've have had a lengthy career on the public service side of the fence. When I use that language, I use it because you used it.

Ms. Alison Irons: Sure. I like to think that we're joined at the hip.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: You talk about person Y, and I'll refer to that individual as person Y. When I take a look at the timelines you've laid out here, you've said that nine years prior to person Y committing the crime, he bought the shotgun and the other long gun. Is that correct?

Ms. Alison Irons: Yes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Your daughter was killed in 2013. Is that correct?

Ms. Alison Irons: Yes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: At that particular point in time, person Y would have had to go through a process—

Ms. Alison Irons: A renewal.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: —that would have been put in place by the party that is currently in government right now and is changing the legislation. The long gun registry would have been in place.

Ms. Alison Irons: Yes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: The licensing and acquisition system would have been put in place under Bill C-68 at that particular point in time?

Ms. Alison Irons: Yes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Yet your entire testimony was a damnation of that process epically failing your daughter.

Ms. Alison Irons: Yes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I want to get it right. I know that my colleagues across the way want to get it right.

You had a couple of recommendations whereby the firearms officer from the Ontario Provincial Police.... That is my understanding. Is that right?

Ms. Alison Irons: Continue your sentence, because I want to know what you're referencing when you reference the firearms officer there.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: The chief firearms officer would have had a role to play in the issuing, the granting, of the licence in the first place.

Ms. Alison Irons: Yes, definitely.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I think that's what the problem is.

When Mr. Goodale was before the committee in the last week that we sat, I asked him.... I said that he could get unanimous consent on this bill if we simply dealt with that licensing part and the background checks, expanding and strengthening that, and forewent the other parts of it. I asked if he would agree to that, and he said no. Would—

The Chair: Mr. Calkins, unfortunately you have run through your time. This is an important question, and I'm sure Ms. Irons would like to answer it. Possibly during Ms. Dabrusin's last couple of minutes you might work in that answer, depending on Ms. Dabrusin.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: I would like to allow you to answer that question, so perhaps we can start there.

Ms. Alison Irons: I vehemently disagree with the delegated authority of chief firearms officers to override those stage A failures for somebody with this sort of background.

However, as I said before, that's not the only difficulty we have in the licensing system right now, which is the Canadian firearms information system. I could go on, and I'm trying to keep my remarks narrow, but for example, I was told by one source that police forces across Canada and many individual police officers are not sufficiently familiar with the codes to use on occurrence reports to trigger a firearms hit in the firearms information system. That's one flaw. The inability of our infrastructure technologically across the country for small jurisdictions to send information to the systems is also a major flaw. It's not simply a matter of background checks. It's all the supports underneath them.

● (1300)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Earlier you had touched on the fact that regulations play an important role in all of this as well.

Ms. Alison Irons: Absolutely.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: I'm not going to have the kind of time with you to go into it more, but perhaps you're able to respond in writing if you have suggestions of what you would like us to look at. What do you think should go into the regulations to make a more fulsome piece of legislation, from your perspective? You have about half a minute if you want to jump in.

Ms. Alison Irons: Some of it is in my brief. Some of it pertains to who your PAL references can be. I don't think they should be immediate family members or close friends. Passport requirements are stricter, but you can't shoot somebody with a passport.

I've mentioned the stage A failure override and the system data, and I've also read, for example—although it's not confirmed and it's been in newspaper reports—that due to resource levels, references are rarely contacted, if ever. I don't know what sort of validation ever goes on to ensure they're appropriate to be providing a reference for somebody applying for a gun, and so on. There are many areas I could touch on.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: I think I'm out of time, but you can also provide us more—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dabrusin.

To the witnesses, Ms. Irons and Mr. Gaudreault, thank you for coming before the committee and contributing to our study.

Just immediately prior to adjourning, colleagues, I intend to put before the House the unanimous report of the committee, and with colleagues' permission, I'm going to suggest that we call the chief of corrections to the committee in the fall to respond to the report.

Ms. Pam Damoff: When are you tabling it?

The Chair: I'm going to do it tomorrow.

I suggest that in the fall, he or she come before the committee and respond to the committee so that we get some real response.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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